Weatherald, Doggett to debut for Australia in Ashes opener

PERTH: Opening batter Jake Weatherald and pace bowler Brendan Doggett will make their debuts for Australia in the first Ashes clash in Perth on Friday, the first time since January 2019 that two new baggy green caps have been handed out before a single Test.

Steve Smith, standing in as captain for the injured Pat Cummins, named the team in his eve-of-match press conference at Perth Stadium on Thursday, ending months of speculation about the opening partnership.

Weatherald's inclusion to open the batting with Usman Khawaja combined with Cameron Green's recovery from injury meant no place in the team for seven-Test all-rounder Beau Webster.

In-form Marnus Labuschagne, who has been used as a makeshift opener, will bat at his favoured number three position ahead of Smith and Travis Head.

Labuschagne was dropped ahead of Australia's mid-year Test tour of the West Indies after an extended lean spell but came roaring back with five centuries in eight innings this season for Queensland.

Doggett will stand in for the injured Josh Hazlewood and Scott Boland, as expected, replaces Cummins in a weakened pace attack that also features stalwart left-arm quick Mitchell Starc, with Smith confident they will rise to the occasion.

"Injuries happen in sport, particularly in cricket with fast bowlers," Smith told reporters in Perth. "So, unfortunate that those two are out, but I think an exciting opportunity for Scotty and for Brendan."

Nathan Lyon, in his 140th Test, provides the spin option with the veteran generally thriving on home soil, where he has bagged 268 of his 562 Test wickets at an average of 31.08.

Match starts at 7:20am (PST)

He needs two more to surpass Glenn McGrath and become the sixth-highest wicket-taker in history.

"It looks a good wicket, pretty similar to last year's one," said Smith. "I think it's going to have some decent pace and bounce in it."

Much of the selection of the batting order was always going to rest on the fitness to bowl of all-rounder Green, who struggled with a side issue last month as he made his comeback from a serious spinal problem.

The 26-year-old, who brings genuine quick bowling and explosive batting to the team, declared himself ready to go with both bat and ball on Tuesday, allowing selectors to bring in Weatherald as a specialist opener.

Weatherald, who boasts a modest first class average of 37.47, will be Khawaja's sixth opening partner in 15 Tests since David Warner retired from the format in January of last year.

The 31-year-old will not do much to lower the average age of a team packed with thirty-somethings but will be expected to quickly transfer his good recent form for Tasmania into the Test arena.

"I watched him bat in the nets pretty closely the last few days and they were pretty tricky nets, fast, bouncy and a lot of seam," Smith said of Weatherald.

"And you know, he's got a lot of courage. He wants to face bowlers the entire time, and the guys were charging in fast. I'm really excited for him. He's worked hard for a long period of time and I think he's going to complement Uzzie [Khawaja] pretty well up top."

Doggett, like many an Australian quick of his generation, has plugged away consistently for his native Queensland and South Australia in domestic cricket while Cummins, Hazlewood and Starc have locked up the Test spots.

Also 31, he sprung into contention to become the first quick bowler to debut since Boland in 2021 when Hazlewood and uncapped Ashes squad member Sean Abbott both suffered hamstring injuries in a Sheffield Shield match in Sydney last week.

"He is very skilful," said Smith. "I think he's improved a hell of a lot in the last few years, and I'm excited to see him go about his business."

His selection along with Boland means Australia will field two indigenous players in a Test team for the first time on Friday.

STOKES TELLS ENGLAND TO 'WRITE OUR OWN HISTORY'

England drew 2-2 at home in the most recent Ashes series, in 2023, but have not won in Australia since 2010/2011.

England captain Ben Stokes admitted on Thursday beating "a seriously good" Australia will be tough but said his team was up for the challenge and had a golden opportunity to rewrite Ashes history.

"Coming to Australia, playing against Australia, they're a seriously good team," he said. "Everyone, including myself, knows the record of England over the history of Ashes in Australia isn't the best.

"But you know, we've got an opportunity here over the next two-and-a-half months to write our own history. We've obviously come here with a goal and that goal is to get on that plane mid-January, returning to England being Ashes winners. We know it's going to be very, very tough. It's going to be hard because beating Australia is not an easy thing."

The visitors have named a squad of 12 for the first Test and will confirm their team at the toss.

England named a 12-man squad for the opening Test but are set to leave the final decision on who to omit until the toss.

Much will depend on how veteran paceman Mark Wood is feeling after an injury scare last week, along with a final look at a wicket which is expected to be lively.

If Wood is good to go, they will potentially field an all-speed attack also boasting Jofra Archer, Gus Atkinson and Brydon Carse, although the option of including off-spinner Shoaib Bashir remains on the table.

Wood only sent down eight overs in the game last week before heading for scans on a hamstring niggle. He was cleared, but has barely played since knee surgery earlier this year.

Stokes said he had no concerns about the 35-year-old, who was "flying".

"I know you guys say he only bowled eight overs in the game, but he's been bowling for a long, long time," he said. "He has always been someone who can just hit the ground running in the game, and he's bowling rapid, which is good."

Teams:

Australia: Usman Khawaja, Jake Weatherald, Marnus Labuschagne, Steve Smith (captain), Travis Head, Cameron Green, Alex Carey, Nathan Lyon, Mitchell Starc, Scott Boland, Brendan Doggett.

England: Ben Stokes (captain) Jofra Archer, Gus Atkinson, Shoaib Bashir, Harry Brook, Brydon Carse, Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Ollie Pope, Joe Root, Jamie Smith, Mark Wood.—Agencies

ZIMBABWE captain Sikandar Raza plays a shot as Sri Lankan wicket-keeper Kusal Mendis looks on during their tri-series T20 International at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium on Thursday.—Tanveer Shahzad/White Star

Bennett, Raza and bowlers combine as Zimbabwe crush hapless Sri Lanka

By Kashif Abbasi

Scoreboard

ZIMBABWE:	
B. Bennett c Perera b Hasaranga	49
T. Marumani c&b Theekshana	10
B. Taylor b Malinga	11
S. Raza c Shanaka b Chameera	47
R. Burl b Hasaranga	18
T. Munyonga lbw b Hasaranga	0
T. Musekiwa b Malinga	11
B. Evans run out	4
T. Maposa not out	5
G. Cremer not out	3
EXTRAS (LB-3, NB-1)	4
TOTAL (for eight wickets, 20 overs)	162
DID NOT BAT: R. Ngarava	
FALL OF WICKETS: 1-26 (Marumani), 2-40 (Taylor), 3-101 (Bennett), 4-124 (Burl), 5-124 (Munyonga), 6-141 (Raza), 7-147 (Evans), 8-154 (Musekiwa)	
BOWLING: Thushara 3-0-30-0, Theekshana 4-0-30-1, Chameera 4-0-27-1, Malinga 4-0-27-2, Hasaranga 4-0-32-3, Shanaka 1-0-13-0 (1nb)	
SRI LANKA:	
P. Nissanka c Cremer b Ngarava	0
K. Mendis run out	6
K. Perera c Ngarava b Maposa	4
B. Rajapaksa b Evans	11
D. Shanaka c Taylor b Burl	34
K.D. Mendis b Raza	9
W. Hasaranga c Bennett b Cremer	8
D. Chameera c Maposa b Ngarava	1
M. Theekshana b Evans	8
E. Malinga c Cremer b Evans	1
N. Thushara not out	1
EXTRAS (B-2, LB-4, W-6)	12
TOTAL (all out, 20 overs)	95
FALL OF WICKETS: 1-1 (Nissanka), 2-6 (Perera), 3-25 (K. Mendis), 4-29 (Rajapaksa), 5-52 (K.D. Mendis), 6-75 (Shanaka), 7-80 (Chameera), 8-82 (Hasaranga), 9-89 (Malinga)	
BOWLING: Ngarava 4-0-15-2 (2w), Maposa 3-0-17-1 (3w), Evans 4-0-9-3, Raza 4-0-23-1 (1w), Cremer 4-0-17-1, Burl 1-0-8-1	
RESULT: Zimbabwe won by 67 runs.	
PLAYER-OF-THE-MATCH: Sikandar Raza	

RAWALPINDI: Under the chilly cloak of a Thursday night here at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium, Zimbabwe authored a performance of stunning authority, dismantling Sri Lanka by a massive 67 runs to record a significant victory in their tri-series T20 International match.

In a display that blended explosive batting with relentless bowling, they first posted a commanding 162-8 before skittling their esteemed opponents for a paltry 95, registering only their third-ever T20 win against the island nation.

The foundation for this landmark triumph was laid by their batsmen, who, after being asked to bat first, constructed a total that always seemed way beyond Sri Lanka's grasp.

The innings ignited early, with opener Brian Bennett shifting from cautious to carnage in the second over, striking off-spinner Maheesh Theekshana (1-30) for three scintillating boundaries. Fellow opener Tadiwanashe Marumani followed suit, hitting two more off pacer Nuwan Thushara, propelling Zimbabwe into a comfortable position.

The breakthrough came from Theekshana, who induced a soft leading edge from Marumani for a simple return catch.

The momentum threatened to stall further when debutant Eshan Malinga enjoyed a dream start, cleaning up Brendan Taylor.

But from 42-2, the match-defining partnership blossomed. Bennett, displaying a mix of elegance and power, was joined by his skipper, Sikandar Raza. Together, they steadied and then accelerated the innings, stitching a crucial 61-run stand.

They rotated the strike with intelligence while punishing loose deliveries, bringing up their fifty partnership in style with a boundary.

Just as Zimbabwe looked set for an explosive finish, heartbreak struck Bennett for the second game running. On the cusp of a deserved half-century, he top-edged a sweep off the wily Wanindu Hasaranga to be dismissed for a brilliant, yet agonising, 49 off 42 balls.

Bennett's departure triggered a mini-collapse, masterminded by Hasaranga. Ryan Burl, after smacking two sixes in his 11-ball 18, was undone by a brilliant googly that clattered into his stumps. Two balls later, Tony Munyonga was trapped lbw in front by another Hasaranga wrong'un, leaving Zimbabwe at a precarious 133 for 6.

Through the chaos, captain Raza stood firm. Refusing to take his foot off the pedal, he launched Thushara for a boundary and a six, racing to 47 from 32 balls.

His valiant knock was ended by a moment of sheer brilliance in the field. Sri Lankan captain Dasun Shanaka, sprinting full-tilt from long-off, plucked a stunning catch to dismiss his opposite number off Dushmantha Chameera.

Despite a late six from Tashinga Musekiwa, Sri Lanka's bowlers tightened their grip at the death, restricting Zimbabwe to 168.

Hasaranga (3-32) and Malinga (2-27) were the chief architects of the restraint.

What followed was a clinical demolition job by the Zimbabwean bowlers. From the outset, they suffocated the Sri Lankan top order with disciplined line and penetrating pace.

The pressure built relentlessly, and the wickets fell in a steady, humiliating procession. The experienced Sri Lankan batsmen had no answer, their innings never finding any rhythm or partnership of substance.

The tone was set by Richard Ngarava (2-15), whose inswinger accounted for opener Pathum Nissanka (nought), who after playing out four dots, miscued a desperate heave to midwicket. Kusal Perera (four) followed, skying a delivery from Tinotenda Maposa to fine leg.

The innings then descended into farce with the dismissal of Kusal Mendis (six). Bhanuka Rajapaksa, in a moment of sheer absent-mindedness, punched the ball straight to cover and set off for a run that never existed. While the throw was poor, Kusal Mendis, frozen at the non-striker's end.

Rajapaksa (11), clearly rattled, survived a subsequent run-out chance thanks to another wayward throw, but his agony ended soon after. Trying to break the shackles, he charged down the pitch only to be comprehensively cleaned up by Brad Evans (3-19). At 45-4 after 10 overs, Sri Lanka faced a freefall.

The collapse was cemented when Raza (1-23) cleaned up Kamindu Mendis (nine) in the 11th over, leaving half the side back in the pavilion.

A brief flicker of resistance came from captain Dasun Shanaka, who clubbed two fours and as many sixes but his fightback was cut short by Ryan Burl (1-8), who found the edge to send the skipper packing.

From there, it was a mere procession. Ngarava returned to have Dushmantha Chameera caught at third man, and Wanindu Hasaranga holed out to Bennett at cow corner, the final acknowledgment of a lost cause.

The tail was swiftly mopped up, with Evans (3-9) fittingly cleaning up Maheesh Theekshana with a devastating yorker on the final ball of the last over to seal the win.

India won't risk another Gill injury in second S. Africa Test match

GUWAHATI: India will not play skipper Shubman Gill in the second Test against South Africa on Saturday if there is any concern about a recurring neck spasm, batting coach Sitanshu Kotak said on Thursday.

Gill has travelled with the squad to Guwahati but faces a race against time, with a decision set to be made late on the eve of the match.

The top-order batsman suffered neck spasms in the first innings of the opening Test in Kolkata which India lost by 30 runs and pulled out of the remainder of the match, spending a night in hospital.

"He is definitely recovering really well," Kotak told reporters, amid reports in Indian media that Gill is set to miss the Test.

"The decision will be taken tomorrow evening because the physios, doctors will have to take a call that even if he is fully recovered he should not get the spasm again during the game.

"If we have a guarantee that very likely he won't have this issue again, then he will play. If there is a doubt, he will take rest [for] one more game, because it won't be helpful to the team,"Kotak added.

Vice-captain Rishabh Pant, an experienced player, will lead the hosts if Gill misses the second Test.

India lost a low-scoring first Test inside three days after they failed to chase down 124 on a turning pitch with inconsistent bounce.

A batter short with Gill out, India were bundled out for 93 to trail the two-match series 1-0.

Kotak said the hosts have a strong bench to fill Gill's spot if the captain does not play.

"Any team would miss a player and a captain like Shubman. But if he misses out because of an injury, then we have plenty of good players who should step up and perform for the team," added Kotak.

If right-handed batter Gill is absent, Sai Sudharsan could reclaim his spot in the top order, with Devdutt Padikkal and Nitish Kumar Reddy also available as alternatives.

South Africa, led by Temba Bavuma, are chasing a first series win on Indian soil since Hansie Cronje's team triumphed there in 2000.

After the Test match series India and South Africa will meet in three One-day International games and five T20 International matches between November 30 and December 19. —Agencies

Mushfiqur joins elite club with ton in 100th Test

MIRPUR: Bangladesh's Mushfiqur Rahim joined an elite club on Thursday by scoring a century in his 100th Test, achieving the feat against Ireland in Mirpur.

Resuming on 99 overnight, Mushfiqur reached his hundred with a single in the second over of the morning session on day two of the second Test.

The 38-year-old batsman removed his helmet, raised both hands in the air and dropped to the ground in celebration.

His knock placed him among an exclusive group of players to have marked the 100-Test milestone with a hundred.

The others are Colin Cowdrey (104 runs), Javed Miandad (145), Gordon Greenidge (149), Alec Stewart (105), Inzamam-ul-Haq (184), Ricky Ponting (120 & 143 not out), Graeme Smith (131), Hashim Amla (134), Joe Root (218) and David Warner (200).

It was the 13th Test ton for Mushfiqur, who is now level with Mominul Haque for the highest number of centuries in Test cricket for Bangladesh.

He eventually fell to left-arm spinner Matthew Humphreys for 106, edging to second slip where Andy Balbirnie completed a sharp catch.

The Ireland team offered warm applause as Mushfiqur left the field to loud cheers from the home crowd at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

Mushfiqur faced 214 balls and struck five fours during his milestone innings, which helped ease the early pressure after Bangladesh slipped to 95-3 on the opening day.

Bangladesh won the first Test by an innings and 47 runs.—AFP

BANGLADESH batter Mushfiqur Rahim celebrates scoring the century against Ireland during the second Test at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium on Thursday.—AFP

Arshad defends gold at Islamic Solidarity Games, Yasir bags silver

RIYADH: Pakistan dominated the men's javelin throw final at the sixth Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh as Arshad Nadeem expectedly defended his gold medal and Mohammad Yasir won silver on Wednesday.

Arshad was in a league of his own headed into the seven-man event; his personal best of 92.97m — which won him gold and the games record at the Paris 2024 Olympics, was head and shoulders above the rest of the field.

Predictably, he had the lead from the start and was the only competitor to throw more than 80m — prompting hearty Arabic praise from the commentators — though he looked disappointed after most of his throws.

The 28-year-old took home gold with a modest 83.05m throw on his second attempt, well below his 88.55m throw at the previous edition that won gold broke the games record.

Meanwhile, Yasir shifted gears in the sixth and final throw to win silver in 76.04m after overtaking Nigeria's Samuel Adams Kure, who bronze in 76.01m.

The duo's medals took Pakistan's tally at the games to four; boxers Fatima Zahra and Qudratullah both won bronze medals in their respective categories.

A sparse audience at the Prince Faisal Bin Fahd Stadium was seen clustered behind the javelin throwing sector, waving Pakistani flags and holding up their mobile phones to get a picture of the javelin superstars in action.

Arshad opened his campaign with a low 75.44m first throw before breaching the 80m mark on his second and third throws. However, by his fourth throw he had come back to 77.06m and had a no throw on his fifth attempt.

Javelin in hand, he turned to the crowd before his sixth and final throw and orchestrated the audience with rhythmic claps above his head.

The 77.98m final throw was inconsequential to his standings; he bent to the floor in prostration as he secured his gold medal before shaking hands with the other throwers zipping up their tracksuit jackets in the cool 20 degree weather that the capital offered them.

Eager fans thronged the six foot two inch star athlete to take selfies with him as he made his way to coach Salman Butt in the stands.

Yasir's desire for an 80m plus throw will have to wait till next year; the 27-year-old registered modest throws of 70.32m, 74.43m, 72.82m, 73.78m and 71.79m to seal a bronze medal right from the first throw.

However, he snatched the silver from Nigeria's Kure with a final throw of 76.04m to give Pakistan a one-two finish in the event.

Other competitors of the night included Guyana's Leslain Alvino Baird, Sarvar Ismoilov of Uzbekistan, Abdulrahman Alazemi of Jordan and Ali Al Abdulghani of the host nation, who finished seventh.

Speaking after the event, Arshad said it was the nation's prayers that won him the gold medal.

"I'm quite happy because I won this accolade right after my injury. My focus now is on preparing for competitions in 2026, because prior to this I was consumed with my injury, surgery and recovery.

"I thank God for letting me get back to this level of fitness, and I congratulate the nation on this win."

Yasir was not too far off from his personal and season's best throw of 77.43m that won him a bronze medal at the Asian Throwing Championships in South Korea this August.

The duo last competed together in May at the Asian Athletic Championships in Gumi, South Korea, where Arshad won gold in 86.40m while Yasir finished eighth with a 75.39m throw.

This was Arshad's third international outing of the year. His run at the Tokyo World Athletics Championships ended in 10th place owing to calf pain, for which he had surgery over the summer.

The games in Riyadh were an anomaly for most track and field athletes whose season ended in Tokyo. The Diamond League circuit was adjusted this year to end before the world championships.—Agencies